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NEWS RELEASE

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Judicial Council Approves Major Recommendations on Foster Care Reform

Proposals Aim to “Change the Way Juvenile Dependency Courts do Business” and Promote Collaboration among Courts and Agencies Serving Children and Families

San Francisco—By a unanimous vote, the Judicial Council of California today approved a sweeping set of recommendations by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care to improve the state’s juvenile dependency court system and improve outcomes for children in foster care and their families.

Capping a two-year inquiry into the courts’ role in foster care, the Commission is the first of its kind to focus on the role of the courts and its responsibility for foster children in California.

Chief Justice Ronald M. George appointed the commission, chaired by Supreme Court Justice Carlos R. Moreno, in March 2006. The commission’s recommendations focus on both preventing the need for foster care as well as improving the system itself. More than half of California’s nearly 80,000 foster children remain in care for two or more years, 17 percent of them for more than three years.

The commission issued four overarching recommendations, including 79 specific proposals for change. Overarching recommendations address 1) providing preventive services to families when children can be safely kept with their families and permanent homes for children who cannot; 2) court reforms; 3) collaboration among courts and partner agencies that work with children and families; and 4) the need for adequate, flexible and stable funding.

Highlights of the commission’s specific recommendations include:

- **Child abuse prevention and services funding --** The Judicial Council should work with state and federal leaders to allow greater flexibility in the use of federal funds for prevention and to eliminate barriers to coordinating funds for prevention and services.
- **Prioritizing foster care --** All agencies and the courts should prioritize children in foster care and their families when providing services and when allocating and administering public and private resources.

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- **Caseloads** -- The Judicial Council should advocate reasonable judicial, attorney, and social worker caseloads.
- **Data and information** -- The Judicial Council should support the courts and all partners in the child welfare system in eliminating barriers to the exchange of essential information and data about the children and families they serve.
- **Disproportionality** -- The courts and child welfare agencies should work to reduce the disproportionate number of African-American and American Indian children who are in the child welfare system.
- **Kinship** -- Child welfare agencies should engage family members earlier and the Judicial Council should work with state and federal leaders to develop greater flexibility in approving relative placements when necessary.
- **Indian child welfare** -- The courts, child welfare and other agencies should collaborate with Indian tribes and tribal courts to ensure that Indian children and families get the services for which they are eligible.
- **Extended support for transitioning youth** -- The Judicial Council should urge Congress and the state Legislature to extend the age for children to receive foster care assistance from 18 to 21.
- **A meaningful voice in court** -- The courts should ensure that all participants in dependency proceedings, including children and parents, have an opportunity to be present at and heard in court. CASA programs should be expanded to all counties.
- **Local commissions** -- The courts and child welfare agencies should jointly convene multidisciplinary commissions at the county level to identify and resolve local concerns and to help implement commission recommendations and related reforms.

With the Judicial Council's approval, the commission will now develop an implementation plan to be presented at the council's December meeting that will continue to move the recommendations forward. Information on the commission and its full set of recommendations can be found at: www.courtinfo.ca.gov/blueribbon.

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.